



Improving Attendance for Students at the Cusp of Chronic Absence

April 3, 2025 12:00-1:00 p.m.

Please introduce yourself in the chat, your name, role, and LEA. Rename yourself on Zoom so your LEA name appears

PRESENTED BY

Maryland State Department of Education and Attendance Works

State Response to the Chronic Absence Crisis

- Set a goal to **reduce chronic absence to 15% by 2027**
- Established a **state attendance task force**
- Developing spring attendance and beginning of the school year **toolkits**
- Exploring **updates to policy, guidance, and regulations** to modernize Maryland's approach to attendance and absenteeism
- **Community of Practice**



Workshop and Toolkit Overview

The toolkit will cover 4 steps for tackling chronic absence Spring 2025

1. Strengthen your LEA Attendance Team
2. Engage in messaging and activities to Reduce the Spring Attendance Slide.
3. Reach out to students at the cusp of chronic absence
4. Identify and address common barriers to attendance

Workshop 1: *Working Together to Reduce the Spring Attendance Slide*

- Topics will include strengthening LEA teams, springtime messaging, and activities.

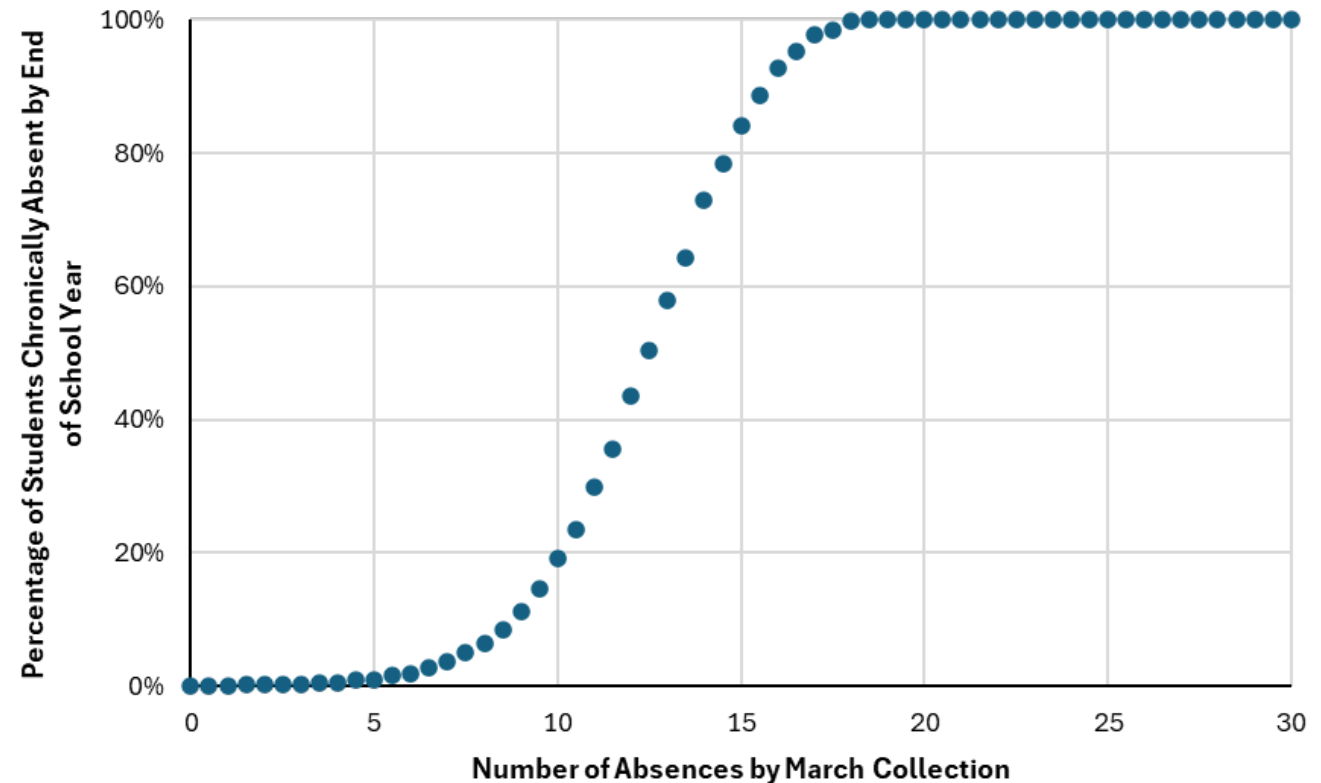
Workshop 2: *Identifying Students at the Cusp*

- Topics will include identifying students at the cusp of chronic absence and tackling systemic barriers to student attendance.

Identifying Students at the Cusp

Students with more than **12.5 absences** by early to mid-March 2024 were more likely than not to be chronically absent.

Students with less than **10 absences** were less than **20%** likely to be chronically absent by the end of the year, while students with **15 or more absences** were **more than 80%** likely to be chronically absent.



Based on 2023-2024 data

Moving to Prevention and Systemic Solutions

Panelists



Lori Phelps

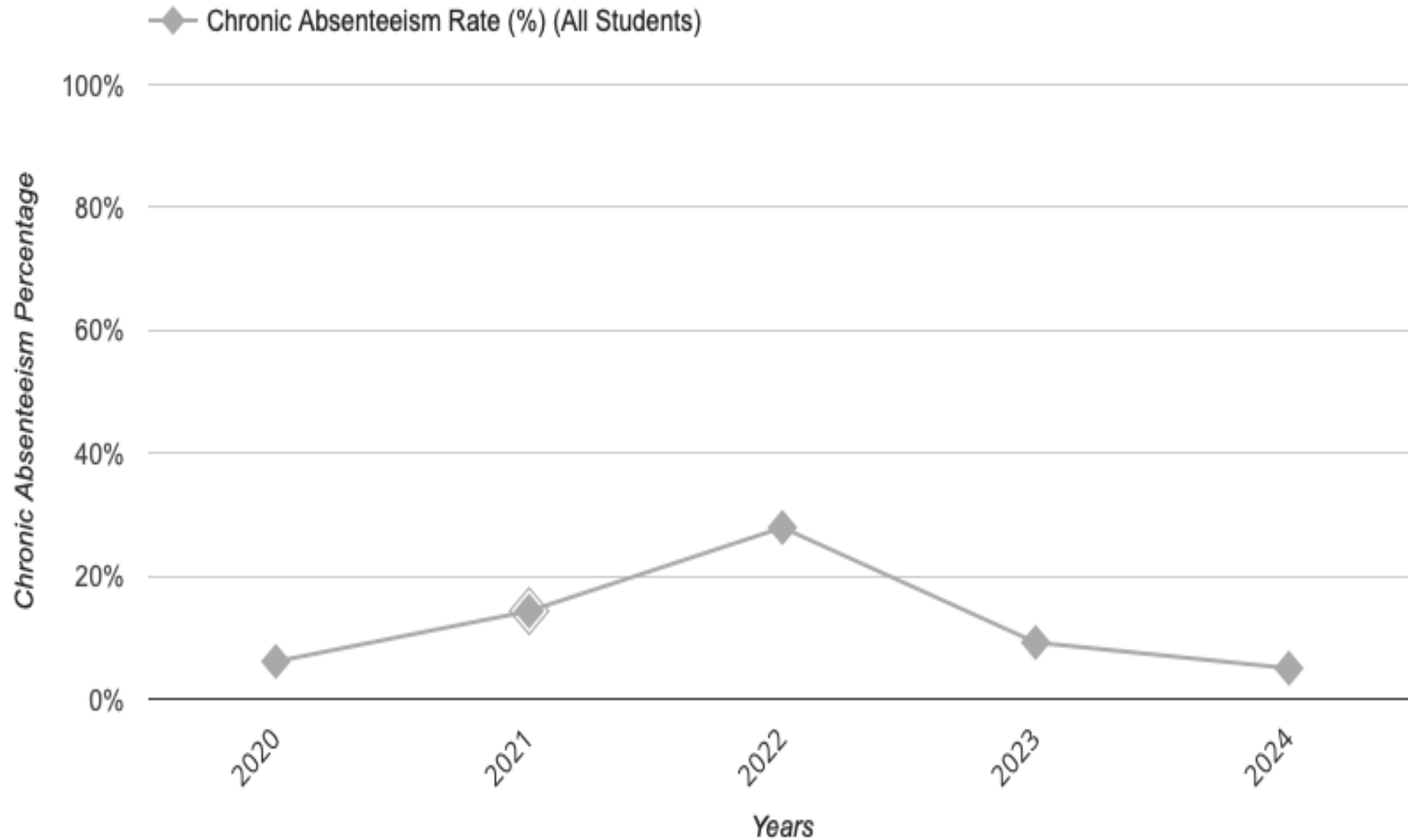
Principal of Woodbridge Elementary School
Baltimore County Public Schools



Ryan Voegtlin

Assistant Superintendent of Student Services
Anne Arundel County Public Schools

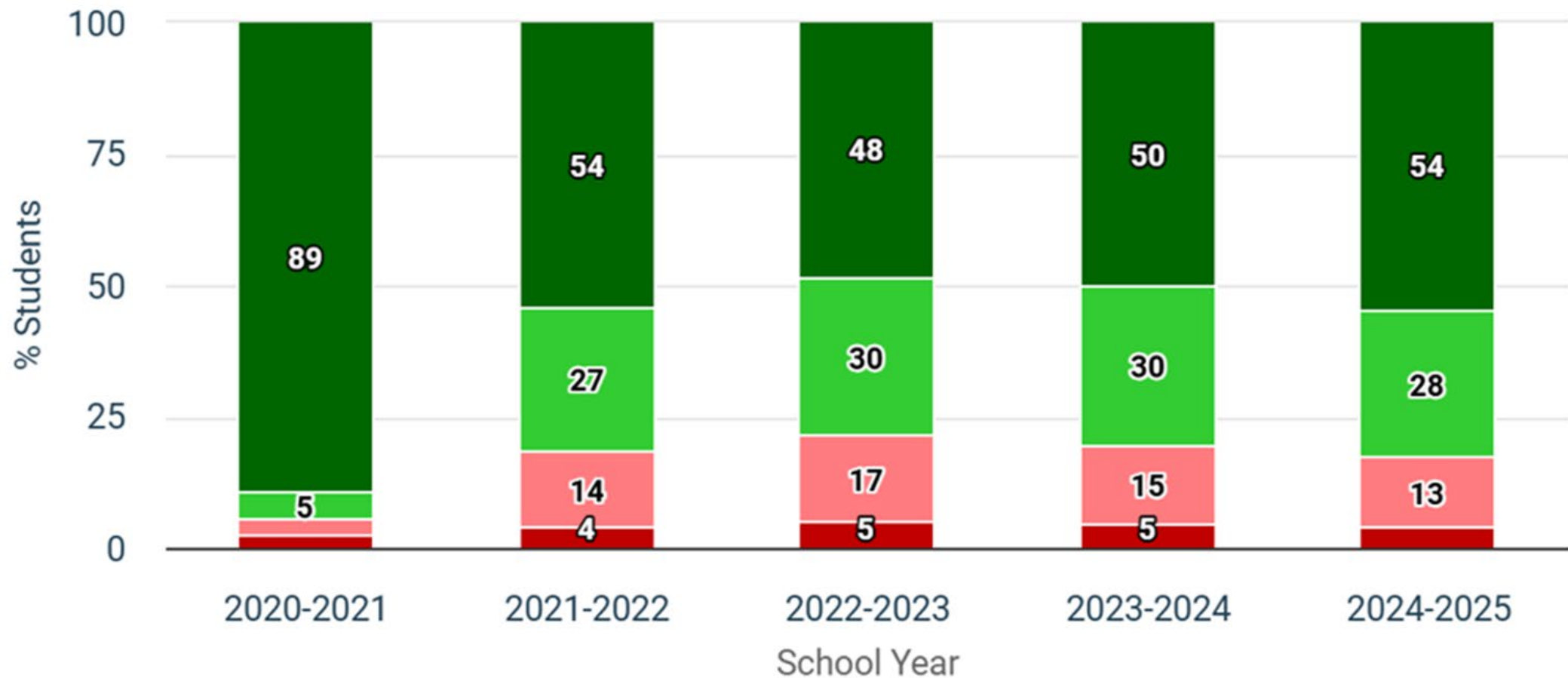
Woodbridge Elementary School



Anne Arundel County Public Schools

Chronic Absences by Year

Percent of chronically absent students over time. (Satisfactory < 5%; At Risk between 5% and 9.99%; Chronic between 10% and 19.99%; Severely Chronic > = 20%). You are viewing the historical chronic attendance of your current, active students unless you change the filters.



1. How do you use data to take a prevention-oriented approach?

Woodbridge Elementary School

ATTENDANCE SUMMARY

Grade	Absent	Since Last Meeting	Teacher Contact	Signing In	RPC	Other	Codes
3	37			X			
KG	27.5	19-Mar		X	X	PPW Ref P Attend	
1	25	2	X	X	X		3/24-3/25 Appendix
KG	20			X	X		
1	19			X	X		
2	17			X	X		
2	16.5	18-Mar	X	X	X		Overslept
KG	16			X	X		
2	15.5	25-Mar		X	X	PPW Ref	Wedding for wk; end chronic
KG	15			X	X	PPW Ref	
4	15	19-Mar		X	X		
5	14.5			X	X		
2	14.4			X	Attempt	PPW Ref	
5	14			X	26-Mar		
1	14			X	26-Mar		
KG	14			X	X		
KG	14			X	X	P Attend	
2	14			X	X	P Attend	
KG	14	4	X		X		3/20-3/25, Sick Hospital
KG	13.5			X	X		
KG	13			X	X	P Attend	
3	13			X	26-Mar		
4	13			X	Attempt	PPW Ref	
5	13	19-Mar	X	X			Allergies and Asthma
2	12.5				X		
4	12.5			X	X		
5	12	4	Left VM		X		3/18-3/21

“The Forgotten Groups”

- LATE Enrollments who will NOT GET 17 days before chronic
- WITHDRAW ALS who left ALREADY Chronic

Student	Grade	Absent	Days Enrolled	Since Last Meeting	Teacher Contact	Signing In	RPC/Other	Notes
A	K	9	52			X	X	
B	4	1	8	1				
C	1	1	8	1	X			Stomach bug
D	3	7	58			X	X	
E	5	4	34			X	X	

Withdrawn Student (Chronic)	Percent
F	87%
G	86%
I	89%
J	85%
K	81%
L	85%
M	84%



The Attendance RPC (Required Parent Conference)

1. Generally “Educational”

- a. Except in instances where the family has a history with another child (which we know since the Principal is 11 years and AP is 16 years in the building)
- b. Stresses importance of attendance; reviews child’s academic performance if below grade level
- c. Discusses barriers to attendance
 - i. school refusal?
 - ii. lengthy illness?
 - iii. underlying illness/need for Home and Hospital?
 - iv. family vacation?
 - v. identified patterns
- d. Problem-solve the barriers
- e. Review how many days until chronic for the year; give the tracker already filled out
- f. Review potential next steps: PPW Referral, Project Attend, MD Compulsory Education Law

1. SIGN that the meeting occurred and what was covered

2. Give an opportunity to ask any school -related questions





Attendance Tracker



Successful students attend school regularly and are on time. **Track your missed days.**

1	2	3	4	5	6
Date	Date	Date	Date	Date	Date
Reason	Reason	Reason	Reason	Reason	Reason


Satisfactory Attendance

7	8	9	10	11	12
Date	Date	Date	Date	Date	Date
Reason	Reason	Reason	Reason	Reason	Reason

Satisfactory Attendance **Moderate: Contact school for assistance.**

13	14	15	16	17
Date	Date	Date	Date	Date
Reason	Reason	Reason	Reason	Reason

Moderate: Contact school for assistance.

 **18 or more:**
Chronically Absent: Contact school for assistance.

Based on a 180-day school year



How do you use data to take a prevention-oriented approach?

- Encouraging schools to change their meeting schedules to allow for meaningful discussion for Tiers 1, 2, and 3 of an attendance MTSS
- At the Tier 1 and 2 meeting teams look at data to discuss what universal strategies the school can put in place to encourage daily attendance and educate families. Teams also focuses on students who at the cusp of being chronically absent.
- The Tier III meeting focuses on those students who are around 15% or more of absences and need more intensive support.
- Use a technology platform called, “Analytics and Insights” to analyze attendance data. Schools have access to specific protocols to use to look at the data and make decisions to improve attendance.
- Use of focus group and surveys with parents and students to have qualitative data to drive decision-making in the schools.

**2. What have you learned about why
students are missing school?
Who helps you know?
How do you identify patterns?**

Identifying Patterns

1. *Early Dismissals*

- offer to keep in school until regular dismissal time
- attendance contests & prizes
- letters home and reminders the day before to the child
- PPW referrals for residency

2. *Days Before/After Holiday*

- attendance contests & prizes
- letters home and reminders the day before to the child

3. *Mondays/Fridays*

- often reflects shared custody
- insist BOTH parents attend meeting to discuss and hold BOTH accountable

4. *Inclement Weather*

- provide rain/snow gear
- attempt to connect to neighboring family with transportation

5. *Late Arrival (2 -hr delay) or expected snow early dismissals*

- PPW referrals for residency



What have you learned about why students are missing school? How do you identify patterns affecting large numbers of students, not just individual students?

- **We have learned that there are a lot of reasons that students miss school**
 - Right after we went back to in-person learning, we had transportation challenges.
 - During the pandemic, we did such a good job of educating parents on symptoms of illnesses. However, in transitioning back parents seems to be more apprehensive about sending their child to school when there is any kind of minor illness.
 - Lack of interest in school has increased in our secondary students. Mental health challenges have also been a concern.
- **We identify patterns affecting large numbers of students through Analytics and Insights. With this data system, we can analyze data by different student groups.**
 - If there is a group of students who are showing lower attendance compared to another student group, we can adjust the attendance interventions for those students.

3. How do you engage partners in addressing the challenges?

Engage Partners

1. Letters to Parents
 - a. “Your child has now been identified as chronic”
 - b. “Your child has established a pattern of missing school on _____ days. The next _____ day is _____. Please be sure to have your child in school on _____.”
 - c. “Congratulations! Your child has now been removed from the chronically absent list.”
 - d. “Welcome back to the Chronically Absent list”
1. Local Doctors
 - a. Excusing for multiple days at a time; School Nurse calls
1. PTA & School Newsletter – regular updates; provide prizes and incentives for students
1. Community School Incentives for students/parents



How do you engage partners in addressing the challenges?

- AACPS partnered with Attendance Works for three years to create a “Community of Practice” that included administrators, student services staff, and Community Schools staff.
- AACPS is working to change how we partner with parents around attendance working together to overcome barriers to attendance.
- AACPS has partnered with Concentric to provide Tier II home visit and mentoring support for students in many AACPS schools.
- AACPS has partnered with a few local agencies around care coordination. Anne Arundel County has a lot of resources, and this can be overwhelming for families. An increase in care coordination has helped families apply for services and provide support for following through on engaging with those services.
- AACPS has developed many mental health and care coordination partnerships through the Consortium grant funds.

**4. How do you use data to monitor
what is working?**

How do we use data to monitor what is working?

Chronic in October?
NOT Chronic in March

Chronic problems manifest EARLY; we don't wait to begin meetings

STILL CHRONIC

Chronic Attendance

Student	Grade	Homeroom	Absent	Since Last	Teacher Contact	Signing In	RPC	Notes
No	1		9			X	X	
No	4		8.5	2	X	X	10/29	10/15 - 10/16, on steroids per Mom
	2		8			X		
	KG		7.5			X	X	
No	4		7			X	XX	PPW Referral
	3		7	15-Oct		X	10/29	Hospital note
	KG		7	21-Oct		X	X	
	KG		6.5	4	X			10/14 - 10/21, Sick PPW Referral
No	1		6	21-Oct	X	X	X	Family emergency (same excuse as last absence)
	3		6	4	Attempt	X		10/14 - 10/21, No response when called PPW Referral
No	KG		5			X	X	
No	2		5			X		
No	5		5	3	X	X		10/15 - 10/17, Sick- Doctor's note
No	2		5			X		
No	2		5	17-Oct	X	X		Sick
No	5		5			X	X	
No	KG		5			X		
No	2		5			X		
No	2		5			X	X	
No	5		4.5	15-Oct	X	X	10/29	Feeling "a little sick" with a fever
No	3		4	2				10/16 - 10/17
No	5		4			X		
No	4		4			X		
No	4		4			X	X	
No	1		4			X		
No	KG		4	15-Oct	X	X		10/14 - 10/15, Stomach bug
No	3		4			X	X	
No	KG		4	15-Oct	X			10/14 - 10/15, Vomiting
No	4		4			X		
No	4		4	21-Oct	X			Death in family- funeral, out 10/21 - 10/22
No	4		4			X		
No	5		4			X	X	
No	KG		4					
No	2		4					
No	4		4			X		
No	KG		4	3	X			10/15 - 10/17, Fever
No	KG		4			X		

* out today

Chronic for the year

As of 10-21-24

How do you use data to monitor what is working vs. what is not working?

- AACPS schools that have changed their attendance team structures to allow more time analyzing data.
- Schools can monitor the interventions, implementation and the results.
 - Data show that when schools stick with interventions that are working and then increasing the number of students who are engaging in these positive interventions they can get real and lasting results.
- Since reducing chronic attendance is a goal on most school improvement plans, schools are also tying this meeting and data analysis structure to the school improvement process.

5. How can districts equip school leaders?

How can districts equip school leaders?

- Create guidance and consistent structures that encourage the use of data.
- Get all school stakeholders on board to educate students, parents, staff, and the community on the importance of regular school attendance.
- Provide a data system that allows school leaders to have access to good data quickly and train them on how to use the system.
- Provide school leaders with a system or structure that allows them to progress monitor attendance interventions.
- Provide school leaders with resources and interventions that they can use to support improved attendance. Allow them to share what's working for them with their colleagues.
- Leverage grant programs like resources like the Consortium grant funds to help to build a system of care.
- Provide district-wide communication around the importance of school attendance.

Reaching Out, Understanding Challenges & Identifying Solutions



How to Identify Students at the Cusp

DAYS MISSED IN SCHOOL YEAR
Satisfactory Attendance Missed less than 5% (fewer than 9 days in a 180-day year)
At-risk Missed 5-9% (9-17 days in a 180-day year)
Moderate Chronic Absence Missed 10-19% (18-35 days in a 180-day year)
Severe Chronic Absence Missed 20% or more (36 or more days in a 180-day year)



Use Data to Identify and Address Gaps

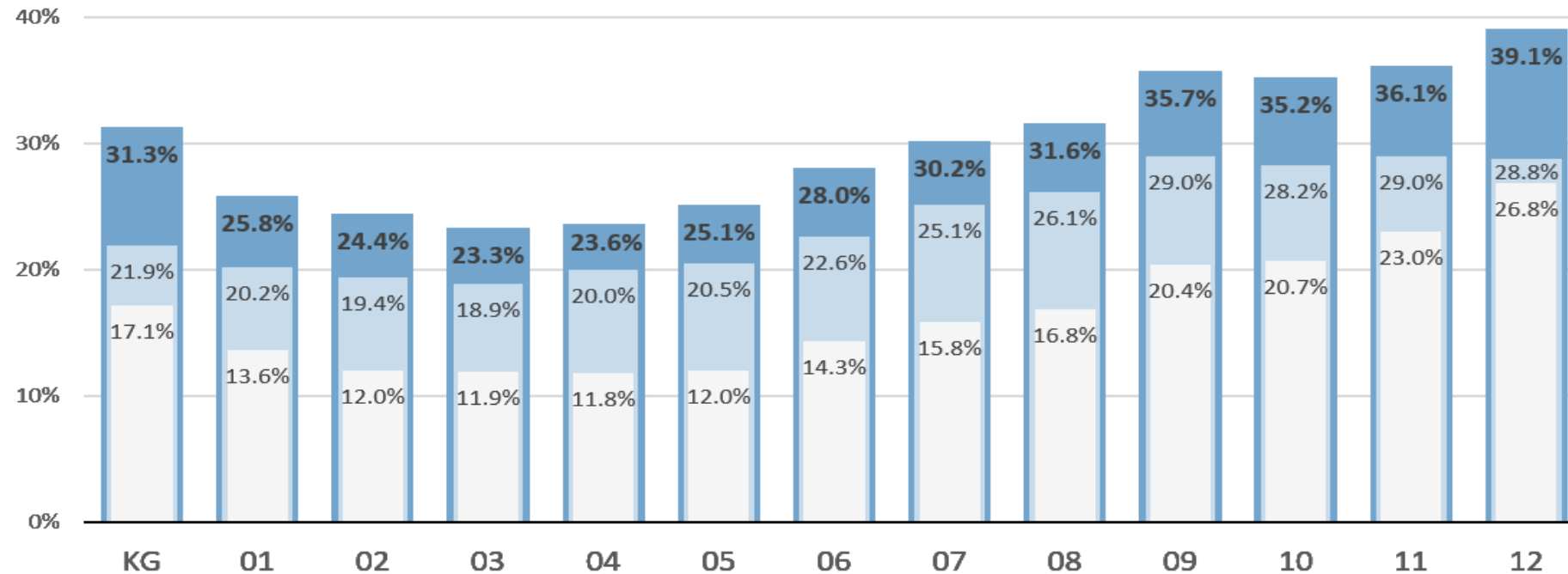
- Analyze data overall, broken down by school, grade, race/ethnicity, home language, disability and zip code
- Use qualitative information, especially drawing upon the perspectives of students and families, to deepen an understanding of the contributing factors
- Determine how to address unequal access to resources



Examining Data Across Grade Levels

Sample data dive:
what patterns do
you notice?

**Chronic Absence
SY 18-19 to SY 21-22**



2018-2019 2020-2021 2021-2022



Poll

Do you know who are the students at the cusp in your districts?

- **Solidly in place**
- **Needs improvement**
- **Urgent gap**
- **Don't know**

What Can LEAs do to support outreach?

1. Ensure a team led by the school administrator organizes outreach to students at the cusp
2. Encourage schools to identify and recruit staff based on relationships to reach out to students and families
3. Provide positive, problem-solving scripts, with a timeline, for reaching out
4. Encourage documenting and capturing reasons for absenteeism ([see this root cause worksheet](#)) to allow for systemic solutions
5. Offer resources schools can share with students and families
6. Equip schools to assign and track interventions
7. Examine whether attendance is improving at schools and by student group

Understanding the root causes for student absenteeism worksheet



When identifying root causes for absenteeism for the students in your classroom or school, consider the positive conditions for learning (see image at left) and which of those conditions are missing for the student(s) who are chronically absent.

Use these questions in the worksheet below to help identify the likely causes of absenteeism. Understanding the root causes of why students are missing too much school can help determine the best course of action. How are the root causes aligned with the conditions for learning? Are there one or more conditions for learning that are not fully realized for the student(s) who are chronically absent?

Healthy Relationships	
Does the student have a positive connection with at least one adult at the school? If yes, who is that person?	Y / N
Does the student belong to any clubs, programs or other activities at the school?	Y / N
Is the student part of a positive peer group at school?	Y / N
Does the student exhibit any worrisome anti-social behaviors?	Y / N
Have you met with the parent/caregiver to discuss attendance concerns?	Y / N

Academic Challenge and Engagement	
Is the student struggling academically? Consider what skills and content the student has missed because of their absences as well as other instructional needs.	Y / N
Does the student need accommodations to benefit from classroom instructions? (e.g. peer support, access to computer, breaks, material presented in different ways, etc.)	Y / N
Is the student having trouble accessing the classroom material due to language barriers?	Y / N
Do you suspect that the student has an unidentified disability?	Y / N
Are there barriers to studying at home?	Y / N



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Belonging Connection and Support	
Are there any clubs, programs or resources before or after school that might help engage the student?	Y / N
Are there cultural, language or other types of barriers that require extra effort on the part of the school to work with the parent/caregiver?	Y / N
Do the parents/guardians recognize the importance of and support regular school attendance?	Y / N
Is the student exposed to race, disability, cultural or LGBTQ biases?	Y / N
Has the IEP/504 team met recently to review and revise the student's educational plan?	Y / N

Adult and Student Well-Being and Emotional Competence	
Does the student exhibit anxiety due to separation from parent/caregiver?	Y / N
Does the student struggle with organizational tasks?	Y / N
Does the student avoid difficult social or academic situations by staying away from school?	Y / N
Has the student identified the reasons for missing school?	Y / N
Has the parent/caregiver identified specific barriers to attendance?	Y / N

Physical and Emotional Health and Safety	
Are there conditions in the classroom, cafeteria or other school areas that affect the student's health or safety? (e.g. mold or other asthma triggers, animal dander, food allergens)	Y / N
Does the student require health or mental health-related treatment that interferes with attendance?	Y / N
Are there problems in the home that contribute to frequent absences? (e.g. parental illness, homelessness, childcare, the health or mental health of the parent/caregiver)?	Y / N
Are transitions difficult for the student? (e.g. entering the school building, moving from class to class)	Y / N
Have there been any reports of bullying?	Y / N

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<https://www.attendanceworks.org/chronic-absence/addressing-chronic-absence/3-tiers-of-intervention/root-causes/>

The Key to Improving Attendance Is What Contributes to Missing School

In Chat: Share the Major Challenges in Your Schools

Barriers

- Chronic and acute illness
- Family responsibilities or home situation
- Trauma
- Poor transportation
- Housing and food insecurity
- Inequitable access to needed services
- System involvement
- Lack of predictable schedules for learning
- Lack of access to tech
- Community violence

Aversion

- Struggling academically and/or behaviorally
- Unwelcoming school climate
- Social and peer challenges
- Anxiety
- Biased disciplinary and suspension practices
- Undiagnosed disability and/or disability accommodations
- Caregivers had negative educational experiences

Disengagement

- Lack of challenging, culturally responsive instruction
- Bored
- No meaningful relationships to adults in the school (especially given staff shortages)
- Lack of enrichment opportunities
- Lack of academic and behavioral support
- Failure to earn credits
- Need to work conflicts with being in high school

Misconceptions

- Absences are only a problem if they are unexcused
- Missing 2 days per month doesn't affect learning
- Lose track and underestimate TOTAL absences
- Assume students must stay home for any symptom of illness
- Attendance only matters in the older grades
- Suspensions don't count as absence

<https://www.attendanceworks.org/chronic-absence/addressing-chronic-absence/3-tiers-of-intervention/root-causes/>

Qualitative Data Tools

Gather information about why students do or don't attend school

- ❑ **Scan of Environment and Attendance Tool (SEAT):** Identify strengths and opportunities to promote positive school culture and strong attendance
- ❑ **Empathy Interviews:** Targeted, one-on-one conversations with a small group of students
- ❑ **2x10:** Relationship and trust building strategy; spend two minutes per day for 10 days talking with a student
- ❑ **Student Focus Groups:** Moderated small group discussions to explore experiences and perspectives
- ❑ **Attendance Café:** Engage parents in discussions about attendance
- ❑ **Student and Parent Surveys:** Ask about reasons behind their absences
- ❑ **Shadow a Student:** See school through your student's eyes and take action to create change.



<https://www.attendanceworks.org/resources/qualitative/>

Questions to Consider

1. What are the issues affecting a large number of students? How would you describe it? How do you know?
2. How many students is this a problem for?
3. What are the students' shared characteristics that contribute to why this issue is directly affecting them? (such as grade level, homeroom friend group, neighborhood or otherwise)
4. Why is it a problem? Who else is involved? What else do we know about the issue and how it is affecting the students?
5. Given the major causes, what strategies, structural changes, support and interventions are needed? Who are possible partners?



Key Ideas

- Identify and document common barriers to attendance by talking with students and families by grade level, group or other defining shared characteristic
- Identify and document what motivates attendance by talking with students and families by grade level, group or other defining shared characteristic
- Identify potential solutions

How to Determine if You are Making a Difference





Measuring Progress

Answer these four key questions:

1. How much did we do? (*quantity*)
2. How well did we do it? (*quality*)
3. What difference did we make for the students who received support?
4. What was the impact on the school as a whole?



Next Steps

- Complete [the evaluation](#)
- Coming Soon:

The Spring Action toolkit will cover 4 steps for tackling chronic absence

1. Strengthen your LEA Attendance Team
2. Engage in messaging and Activities to Reduce the Spring Attendance Slide.
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4. Identify and address common barriers to attendance